

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A - DECONTROL JAN. 1, 1977

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TAGS: PFOR, KS

SUBJECT: AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION RE SOUTH KOREA

REF: SEOUL 07243, STATE 219300, STATE 178984

1. PA WELCOMES RESPONSE IN YOUR 07243 TO ANALYSIS IT TRANSMITTED IN STATE 219300. PA SENT 219300 IN ENCRYPTED CHANNELS TO PREVENT INTERCEPTION OF OUR ANALYSIS. IN MARKING IT FOR DECONTROL UPON RECEIPT WE DID NOT INTEND TO SUGGEST THAT YOU MIGHT WANT TO SHARE ANALYSIS WITH ROKG.

2. ANALYSIS IN PARA TWO SEOUL 07243 IS CORRECT AND YOU WILL HAVE RECEIVED COPY OF CABLE TO ALL RECIPIENTS OF 219300 WHICH ACKNOWLEDGES OUR ERROR. FORTY-THREE PERCENT OF THE PUBLIC FAVOR US STANDING BY ITS COMMITMENTS AND AN ADDITIONAL NINE PERCENT WISH WE WOULD REDUCE OUR COMMITMENTS BUT WOULD GIVE ARMS AND ECONOMIC AID IN THE EVENT OF AN ATTACK FROM THE NORTH.

3. THIS COULD SUGGEST THAT THERE EXISTS A BASE OF SUPPORT IN THE AMOUNT OF 52 PERCENT. THE CAST GIVEN THE FINDINGS
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OF THE ROPER POLL DEPENDS, IN PART, UPON WHETHER THE GLASS

IS VIEWED AS HALF EMPTY OR HALF FULL. FOR EXAMPLE, IT COULD BE ARGUED (AS YOUR CABLE DOES) THAT TO THE BASE OF 43 PERCENT COULD BE ADDED 22 PERCENT WHO WOULD HAVE US LEAVE TROOPS IN SOUTH KOREA AS A DETERRENT EVEN THOUGH THEIR PREFERENCE IS FOR REDUCED COMMITMENTS. THIS WOULD YIELD A FIGURE OF 65.

4. HOWEVER, OUR ANALYST IS NOT SANGUINE THAT A BASE OF SUPPORT OF EITHER 52 OR 65 PERCENT WOULD HOLD UP FOR LONG IN THE EVENT OF AN ACTUAL INVASION BY THE NORTH. AS OUR CABLE TO ORIGINAL RECIPIENTS OF 219300 NOTES, THE NINE PERCENT WHO WOULD SEND AID, AND THE 22 PERCENT WHO WOULD LEAVE TROOPS AS DETERRENT, PROCEED FROM A PREFERENCE FOR REDUCING OUR COMMITMENT, AND OTHER POLL FINDINGS INDICATE CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC SKITTISHNESS.

A. IN THE QUESTION ASKED BY THE HARRIS POLL (REF STATE 178984 PARA 3) SPECIFIC REFERENCE WAS MADE TO US TROOP PRESENCE AND OUR TREATY COMMITMENTS. THE JULY RESULTS INDICATED THAT 46 PERCENT OF THE PUBLIC OPPOSED "THE US USING TROOPS, AIR POWER AND NAVAL POWER TO DEFEND SOUTH KOREA." BUT WHEN RESPONDENTS WERE NOT APPRISED OF THE EXTENT OF OUR EXISTING COMMITMENT IN KOREA, THEIR RELUCTANCE TO SEE THE US BECOME INVOLVED STOOD OUT MORE CLEARLY. THE QUESTION ASKED BY HARRIS IN THE STUDY HE DID FOR THE CHICAGO COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS IN DECEMBER 1974 READ: "THERE HAS BEEN A LOT OF DISCUSSION ABOUT WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES MIGHT JUSTIFY US MILITARY INVOLVEMENT, INCLUDING THE USE OF US TROOPS. DO YOU FEEL IF NORTH KOREA ATTACKED SOUTH KOREA, YOU WOULD FAVOR OR OPPOSE US MILITARY INVOLVEMENT?" ALMOST TWO IN THREE (65 PERCENT) WERE OPPOSED; ONLY 14 PERCENT FAVORED INVOLVEMENT; AND 21 PERCENT HAD NO OPINION. (BY WAY OF CONTEXT, SAME POLL FOUND THAT ONLY IF CANADA WERE INVADED WOULD A CLEAR MAJORITY SUPPORT THE USE OF US TROOPS; NEXT ON LIST WAS WESTERN EUROPE, ALTHOUGH ONLY 39 PERCENT WERE IN FAVOR OF COMMITTING TROOPS.)

B. IN THE SAME CHICAGO CFR POLL THE PUBLIC WAS ASKED WHETHER EACH OF SEVERAL INTERNATIONAL EVENTS IN RECENT HISTORY WERE "PROUD MOMENTS" IN AMERICAN HISTORY, "DARK LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MOMENTS", OR NEITHER. FORTY-ONE PERCENT LOOKED BACK ON THE KOREAN WAR AS A DARK MOMENT IN US HISTORY; 22 PERCENT FELT IT WAS A PROUD MOMENT; 27 PERCENT SAW IT AS NEITHER AND THE REMAINDER HAD NO OPINION. THIS IS CONTRASTED, ON THE ONE HAND, TO THE 68 PERCENT WHO FELT WORLD WAR TWO WAS A PROUD MOMENT, AND ON THE OTHER, TO THE EIGHT PERCENT WHO REGARDED THE VIETNAM WAR AS A PROUD MOMENT.

C. IN JUNE 1975 THE CBS NEWS POLL ASKED: "SUPPOSE
THE UNITED STATES WERE GOING TO SIGN A TREATY WITH SOUTH
KOREA AGREEING TO COME TO THEIR AID IN THE EVENT OF WAR.
WOULD YOU APPROVE IF THAT TREATY PROMISED FOOD AND MEDICAL

SUPPLIES/ARMS AND MILITARY EQUIPMENT/AMERICAN MILITARY
TROOP SUPPORT?" (ALTHOUGH THE PREMISE OF THE QUESTION IS
WRONG, IT MAY UNINTENTIONALLY HAVE GIVEN RESPONDENTS A
CHANCE TO EXPRESS THEIR CURRENT VIEWS ON A "CLEAN SLATE"
BASIS.) THE RESPONSES WERE:

-- -- -- APPROVE DISAPPROVE DON'T KNOW

FOOD AND MEDICAL			
SUPPLIES	68	27	5
ARMS AND MILITARY			
EQUIPMENT	41	51	8
AMERICAN MILITARY			
TROOP SUPPORT	25	67	8

5. REGARDING THE CONCLUSIONS OF X-1 OF EPF 177 SEPT. 12
(REF: SEOUL 07243), HARRIS SELECTIVELY REPORTED HIS FIND-
INGS BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE (OUR
ANALYST WAS PRESENT THROUGHOUT HEARING AND HAD FULL TEXTS
OF ALL PREPARED STATEMENTS). WHILE HE SAID THAT A NARROW
MAJORITY (51 PERCENT) AGREE "THE US WILL HAVE TO BACK
GOVERNMENTS WE DON'T LIKE BECAUSE A COMMUNIST TAKE-OVER
WOULD BE WORSE," HARRIS FAILED TO REPORT A CONFLICTING
FINDING OF HIS STUDY FOR THE CHICAGO CFR. IN THE LATTER
POLL, 67 PERCENT OF THE PUBLIC AGREED "WE SHOULD NOT COMMIT
AMERICAN LIVES TO THE DEFENSE OF CORRUPT GOVERNMENTS
ABROAD." THE QUESTION WAS NOT COUCHED IN THE CONTEXT OF
WHAT THE US SHOULD DO IN KOREA, BUT IT WOULD BE HARD TO
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ASSERT THAT KOREA'S IMAGE IN THE US IS PRISTINE.

6. IT IS DIFFICULT TO EXPRESS JUDGMENTS OF A CONJECTURAL
NATURE CONFIDENTLY. IT IS PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT WHEN SIT-
UATIONS ARE HYPOTHETICAL, AS IN THIS CASE. PA WOULD, HOW-
EVER, MAKE ONE ASSERTION QUITE CONFIDENTLY: AMERICANS ARE
NOT ANXIOUS TO INVOLVE THEMSELVES IN ANOTHER WAR ON THE
HEELS OF INDOCHINA. THE FACT THAT MUCH OF CURRENT OPPOS-
ITION TO STATIONING US TECHNICIANS IN SINAI PENINSULA IS
CAST IN TERMS OF AVOIDING POTENTIAL INVOLVEMENT IN A VIET-
NAME-LIKE SITUATION IS SUGGESTIVE OF PUBLIC ATTITUDES WHICH
ALSO HAVE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR COMMITMENT TO KOREA. THE
FACT (AS OUR 219300 NOTED) THAT THOSE WHO ARE MOST LIKELY
TO HAVE TO FIGHT IN THE EVENT OF HOSTILITIES IN KOREA TEND
TO REACT MORE NEGATIVELY TO THE POSSIBILITY OF AN INVOLVE-

MENT IS ALSO SUGGESTIVE. CLEARLY MUCH WOULD DEPEND UPON
THE MANNER IN WHICH HOSTILITIES ERUPTED, THE IMAGE OF ROK
THEN CURRENT IN THIS COUNTRY, AND (PROBABLY MOST IMPORTANT-
LY) THE EXTENT TO WHICH AMERICAN COMMITMENT WERE PERCEIVED
AS LEADING TO A PROTRACTED, VIETNAM-LIKE INVOLVEMENT. INGERSOLL

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